

Reflection Questions

One of the most elusive teaching skills is asking open-ended questions. Yet helping young people process their service-learning experiences is essential to moving beyond the “feel good” results of the experience to cognitive gains.

High-quality reflection challenges students to think deeply about their service-learning experiences. By encouraging multiple methods of reflection throughout the experience — before, during, and after — teachers can help students reach intended academic, civic and social outcomes. With the questions listed here, the goals are to encourage students to examine their preconceptions and assumptions, generate solutions to local and global problems, and determine roles that they can play in realizing these solutions.

SOURCES

Gallagher, K. (2004). *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts*, 4-12. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Prichard, F. F., and Whitehead, G. I. (2004). *Serve and Learn: Implementing and Evaluating Service-Learning in Middle and High Schools*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.

Taba, H., Durkin, M. C., Fraenkel, J. R., and McNaughton, A. H. (1971). *A Teacher's Handbook to Elementary Social Studies: An Inductive Approach* (2nd ed.). Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.

Journalistic Questions

- Who was involved in the project? What were their roles?
- What was the issue addressed? How did you decide to address this issue?
- When did the service-learning project take place?
- Where were the service-learning project sites?
- Why was this issue critical to the community?
- Why did you choose to address this issue?
- How did you address the issue?

Questions that Encourage Critical Thinking

- What did you see, hear, read, or notice on-site?
- How is what you observed similar or different from your pre-service assumptions?
- Do any of these assumptions seem to belong together? Why?
- Could some of these assumptions belong in more than one category?
- How do you explain what is going on?
- What did you see or hear that agrees with this explanation?
- Is there any evidence that refutes this explanation?

Questions that Encourage Symbolic Thinking

- What object would you use as a symbol of this experience?
- Why would you choose this symbol?
- How does what you are doing make you feel like a garden (or a book, a river, etc.)?
- How are parts of your experience like parts of the garden (book, river, etc.) and why?

Available from the NYLC Resource Center at www.nylc.org.
 Excerpted from *The Generator*, August 2007
 Copyright © 2007 National Youth Leadership Council.

Reflection Activities

- Journal-writing, creative writing, personal essay, or op ed article
- Article for newsletter
- Podcast or public service announcement
- Online discussion groups
- Summaries of group learnings
- Presentations during or after the project, which may include video, computer slide shows, bulletin boards, panel discussions, websites, or persuasive speeches
- Directed reading on complementary topics
- Library research individually or in teams
- Research projects in which students analyze an issue and make recommendations for change
- Creative writing projects
- Discussion in pairs or small groups
- Murals, collages, banners, or musical displays
- Individual or small-group presentations of objects that symbolize the service-learning project
- Poster ad or PSA using a symbol to bring awareness to the issue
- Essay presenting the issue from several points of view
- Visual representations of the issue and the emotions it elicits: cartoons, collage, photos
- Interviews of community partners and beneficiaries of services
- Skit or dance that explains perceptions
- Dialogue journals, in which students are paired and discuss their experiences

Questions to Help Process Emotions

- What bothers you about the issue?
- What do you think about the people or things involved?
- Are your thoughts about the issue facts or opinions?
- Why do you have the opinion that you do?
- What other ways can you view the issue?
- What other facts and opinions might be important to consider?
- How would the issue change if viewed from another perspective?

Extension Questions

- What does this service-learning project mean to me?
- What does this service-learning project mean in terms of other people my age?
Why should people my age be concerned with the issues that arise from this project?
- What does this service-learning project mean to my community? How do the ideas that arise from this service-learning project affect both my community and other communities?
- What does this service-learning project mean in terms of my country?